

EQIP and Grazing Systems

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Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is the USDA program to provide financial incentives for landowners to install conservation practices on their farm. EQIP is a key component of the conservation provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill. There are a couple of significant changes in EQIP that can affect Iowa farmers.

One change is that on a national level 60 percent of EQIP funds are to be used for livestock related practices. It is important to note that this is on a national level.

Another change that can have a big affect on Iowa farmers is the method of distributing the funds to farmers. In the past the EQIP program was developed and funds allocated on a state level. Now the funds will be allocated by the state to local counties and each county will develop their program. Each county will involve partners in their county to identify their resource concerns and then determine what conservation practices best address these resource concerns. Locally each of you have an opportunity to provide your input to help develop a financial assistance program that meets the conservation needs of your county. It is important for you to be involved in this process.

Because EQIP will be managed locally I cannot outline what practices will be eligible for financial assistance in a given location. However, the good news is each county now has the opportunity to target EQIP funds to protect the resources the local people identify as the most important.

In the past the pastureland resource in Iowa has received less attention for using conservation dollars than the cropland resource. Because of the attention to livestock in the 2002 Farm Bill, grazing systems have received more attention than ever. When utilizing EQIP funds for pasture I think it is important to look at your farm as a system and determine what conservation practices can or need to be implemented to improve your system. Today I will share with you some ideas about conservation practices that may be eligible for financial assistance in your county. Please keep in mind some conservation practices may be eligible for assistance in one county and not another and rates of financial assistance may vary between locations.

Water

Water systems are a key component in any grazing system. The following are some practices that may be available in your county.

- **Farm Ponds** – Traditionally ponds have been used in Iowa as a major water source and often provide multiple benefits such as erosion control and wildlife habitat.
- **Wells** – Wells are another alternative that can be a good source
- **Rural Water** – More areas of the state are getting access to rural water systems. This can be a good alternative. The policy towards “pasture hookups” varies greatly between rural water associations.
- **Creeks and streams** – These serve as water sources in many Iowa pastures. In most grazing systems it is beneficial to limit livestock access to these areas and harvest the forage through “flash grazing”. EQIP funds can be used to improve these water areas and also protect the stream.

- **Pumps** – EQIP can be used to provide pumps in a water system to help distribute water.
- **Pipeline** – Water pipeline used to distribute the water in the grazing system is an eligible practice
- **Tanks** – Tanks used for drinking are an eligible component
- **Heavy Use Protection** – Many times a drinking area is bare of any vegetation, subject to erosion and can become a livestock safety problem in muddy conditions. This practice can be used to develop a “hard” surface at a tank. There are many old farm ponds where livestock have direct access to the water. A limited access area and a “hard surface” can be created in old ponds or streams. This can help improve water quality and be safer for the livestock.

Fence

EQIP can provide financial assistance to install fences to control the movement of livestock in the grazing system. A variety of materials can be used which include the traditional barbed wire fence and the New Zealand style electric fence.

Seeding

Seeding needs can vary greatly between grazing systems and even within a system. EQIP funds can be used to establish seeding on land converted from cropland. It can also be used to renovate existing pastureland. In many situations it may only be used to improve an existing pasture through interseeding or frost seeding.

Livestock Exclusion

There may be some “sensitive” areas in a farming system where you would like to exclude livestock. This could be a timber or wildlife area. As previously noted streams are often used as a water source. Excluding the livestock from having continuous access to the stream can help revegetate the stream banks, reduce stream bank erosion, improve water quality and make it safer for livestock. These areas could then be managed and “flash” grazed to utilize the forage.

Brush Management

EQIP funds can be used for brush management. This can be very beneficial in some grazing systems.

Cropland

Currently there is a continuous CRP program to establish contour buffer strips and filter strips. Many counties are considering developing guidelines to provide financial assistance for these practices through EQIP. Then livestock producers could harvest the forage from these areas without having to “buy” back the forage, as on land enrolled in CRP. These conservation practices can work very well in a livestock system because they 1) provide erosion control 2) improve water quality 3) provide wildlife habitat 4) can be utilized for hay production 5) can be stockpiled and grazed in the winter when

livestock utilize the crop residue and 6) can take less productive, highly erodible soils out of row crop production.

EQIP has a lot of potential to assist Iowa farmers to improve the grazing systems. But it is very important you become involved in the local process to identify the resource needs in your county and to provide your ideas on what conservation practices are needed to address these resource concerns. Call your local NRCS office to find out how you can be involved in this process.